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**USTR Notifies Congress Administration Intends  
to Initiate Free Trade Negotiations with Sub-Saharan Nations**

WASHINGTON - United States Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick yesterday formally notified Congressional leaders of the Administration's intent to initiate negotiations for a free trade agreement with the nations of the South African Customs Union: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. The negotiations will be initiated on or after 90 days from yesterday.

"The Administration is committed to bringing back trade agreements that open markets to benefit our farmers, workers, businesses, and families. With the Congress' continued help, we can move promptly to advance America's trade interests," wrote Zoellick in a letter. "We are responding to Congress' direction, as expressed in the African Growth and Opportunity Act, to initiate negotiations with interested beneficiary countries to serve as the catalyst for increasing free trade between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa and for increasing private sector investment in the region."

A free trade agreement with SACU would deepen U.S. economic and political ties to sub-Saharan Africa and lend momentum to development efforts for the region. SACU is the largest U.S. export market in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for approximately \$3.1 billion in exports in 2001. Total two-way trade between the United States and SACU was approximately \$7.9 billion in 2001.

As part of the Administration's ongoing consultative relationship with Congress, Zoellick sent letters to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. In October, Zoellick provided Congress with the formal notification for the Administration's intent to enter into free trade negotiations with Morocco and five nations of Central America. In addition, Zoellick also notified Congress of the U.S. goals and objectives for completing ongoing free trade negotiations with Singapore and Chile and for the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

A copy of the letter can be found on the USTR website ([www.ustr.gov](http://www.ustr.gov)).

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